

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 002229

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [KWMN](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#) [TERRORISM](#)
SUBJECT: KUWAITI PM SAYS THERE WILL BE A FEMALE CABINET MEMBER; HIS VISIT TO THE U.S. WILL STRENGTHEN STRONG TIES

REF: A. STATE 95389

[B](#). KUWAIT 2064
[C](#). KUWAIT 1900
[D](#). KUWAIT 1752
[E](#). KUWAIT 1131

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary: During a May 24 call on Kuwaiti PM Shaykh Sabah, the Ambassador congratulated him on the May 16 vote granting women full political rights and encouraged speed in bringing women into senior government positions. The PM said the GOK would appoint a woman cabinet minister, a matter the Council of Ministers would address May 29. Discussing the successful visit of FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammed to Washington, the Ambassador said it set the stage for the PM's upcoming visit and reviewed with him issues that would interest Washington policy makers. He stressed efforts to promote stability and political progress in Iraq, and urged the PM to take immediate action on Iraqi debt and to transfer DFI assets. He also encouraged continued assistance to the Palestinians and renewing GOK fuel assistance to Jordan; the PM responded there was progress on both fronts. On bilateral issues, the Ambassador raised the serious situation of Kuwait's expatriate labor force and advised the GOK to consult with international organizations to ensure that Kuwait adhered to international labor standards. He commended the improvement in counterterrorism cooperation and pressed the GOK to intensify its search for wanted terrorists and terror financiers. He also noted U.S. interest in the successful participation of American companies in the Kuwait Project and the Al-Zour North Power Plant, and advised the PM of possible problems over taxation of U.S. firms doing business in Kuwait. End Summary.

Female Cabinet Minister To Be Named "Soon"

[¶](#)2. (C) The Ambassador opened the May 24 meeting, which was warm and relaxed, by congratulating Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the historic May 16 vote by the National Assembly granting women full political rights (ref B). Shaykh Sabah, who was in an exceptionally good mood and appeared in very good health, said he thanked God the Government accomplished what it wanted without any external pressure. He told the Ambassador he too had heard the rumors that he would not be welcomed at the White House if the legislation failed to pass, but stated there was no outside influence on the decision. He confirmed the GOK would "soon" name a female minister and said the Council of Ministers would discuss the matter at its regular Sunday meeting on May 29. In response to a query on other possible political reform, the PM said the GOK had submitted to Parliament two redistricting proposals, both of which would reduce the number of districts from 25 to ten. MP reaction was negative and the GOK withdrew its proposals and asked, and is still waiting for, Parliament to present an alternate plan. (Note: Prior to the meeting with Shaykh Sabah, the Ambassador spoke with independent, pro-GOK MP Abdulwahab Al-Awadi, accompanying International Parliamentary Union President Sergio Paez Verdugo, who described ongoing discussions on requiring districts to have at least 10,000 voters. While he agreed the existing smaller districts facilitated vote-buying, he opposed redistricting because it would create large, disjointed districts. End note.)

July PM Visit to Washington to "Cement" Relations

[¶](#)3. (C) The Ambassador also congratulated the PM on the successful Washington visit of Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah (ref A). He described such visits as beneficial to the bilateral relationship, and said the FM should travel more often to Washington. The Ambassador asked Shaykh Sabah about his goals for his July visit. The PM replied that there were no serious problems between the U.S. and Kuwait and he simply wanted to strengthen already strong ties. His ultimate goal was a "distinguished and everlasting relationship" with the U.S. He expressed interest in discussing Iraq and Iran, saying his visit presented an opportunity to learn from each other.

Kuwaiti Aid to Iraq

14. (C) The Ambassador then advised the PM of topics that would likely be of interest to his Washington interlocutors. Beginning with Iraq, the Ambassador mentioned significant interest in debt relief and encouraged the GOK to initiate a bilateral debt relief process. He also encouraged the immediate transfer of Development Fund for Iraq (DFI) assets currently held by the Kuwaiti Mission to the UN (ref C). Shaykh Sabah said Kuwait remained ready to assist Iraq and would participate actively in the upcoming international meeting to support Iraq. He cautioned that debt relief should not be linked to the compensation issue, a position the Ambassador said the U.S. shared. The PM again raised the GOK's \$60 million pledge to Iraq for school and hospital construction in the south and said the GOK was still waiting for Iraqi input on projects (ref C). He also said the GOK was considering favorably an Iraqi request -- from either Iraq's UN Mission or its ambassador in France -- for mobile hospitals that would be deployed to Basrah or Amarah. He added that former Iraqi PM Allawi had requested food assistance, but never sent a representative to Kuwait to discuss Iraq's needs. On DFI, he sought confirmation there were no private claims or judgments against the funds and said, "we are ready to help."

The PA And Jordan Need Kuwaiti Help, Too

15. (C) Continuing with the theme of economic assistance, the Ambassador said the Palestinian people would need more help as Gaza disengagement proceeds. Shaykh Sabah said commitments were made at the Algiers Arab League meeting and the GOK was current on its obligations. Contrary to local press reports, he said there were no official plans for Abu Mazen to visit Kuwait and encouraged the U.S. to assist him to the fullest extent saying there would be no peace in the region without peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. The Ambassador also encouraged fuel aid to Jordan, arguing it was important to help stabilize the economy. Shaykh Sabah reported the recent visit of a Jordanian official who conveyed a request for assistance from King Abdullah. The PM said the GOK was willing to help, but Parliament remained a problem. Nonetheless, Kuwait would assist Jordan in the same way it aided Egypt by setting up a long-term loan to be repaid in installments with interest. He said he would instruct Oil Minister Shaykh Ahmad Fahd Al-Sabah to contact his Jordanian counterpart. He also noted in passing private support he supplies to King Abdullah.

When Foreign Workers Hurt, Kuwait Suffers

16. (C) Turning to bilateral issues, the Ambassador informed Shaykh Sabah of the increasing emphasis in U.S. foreign policy discussions on the treatment of expatriate labor. He said the U.S. recognized the steps the GOK had taken, but there were serious concerns about child camel jockeys and domestic laborers. He encouraged Kuwait to comply with international standards and suggested close cooperation with UNICEF and ILO, which have successfully addressed expatriate labor and trafficking problems in other countries. The PM responded that the GOK takes labor issues very seriously which is why it intervened when Bangladeshi workers revealed they had not been paid (ref D). He also reported the GOK had twice chartered jumbo aircraft to repatriate workers to the Philippines and Indonesia. He said he tasked the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor to "be tough" on trafficking and disputed there were child camel jockeys in Kuwait. He remarked there had been no international criticism of the treatment of expatriate workers in Kuwait and noted his surprise that the U.S. had taken up the issue. Nevertheless, when foreign workers were exploited or hurt, Kuwait "suffers," and the GOK was trying to do a better job in addressing the problems and would also encourage local NGOs to be more active.

CT Still A Priority

17. (C) The Ambassador complimented the PM on strong cooperation between the U.S. and Kuwait on counterterrorism. He said the sharing of information continued to flow and the U.S. was pleased with Kuwaiti participation in training programs. The Ambassador urged the GOK to take advantage of other training offered and suggested a visit to Washington by Kuwait State Security (KSS) Chief Shaykh Athbi Al-Fahd Al-Sabah. He further encouraged the GOK to intensify its efforts to arrest Mohsen Al-Fadhli, Khalid Al-Dosari, and Hamad Al-Harbi, saying their capture would send a very strong message. Shaykh Sabah said he was pleased there had been no incidents since the January shootings, informed the Ambassador he had been briefed on the April ATA training program, and reasserted that KSS was actively seeking Al-Fadhli and others. He restated Kuwait's commitment to counterterrorism.

18. (C) The PM also raised GOK concern about the 11 remaining Guantanamo detainees. He noted detainees had been returned to the UK, Iran, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, and argued the 11 should be immediately returned to Kuwait to stand trial. He said he would raise this issue while in Washington.

U.S. Companies Want To Work In Kuwait

19. (C) The Ambassador also flagged bilateral commercial issues. He said qualified American firms competing for the Kuwait Project and Al-Zour North Power Plant should be given the opportunity to succeed. He noted that three American firms had been pre-qualified for Al-Zour and had met with Shaykh Ahmad on problematic contract issues. The PM welcomed U.S. participation and said U.S. companies would be treated like Kuwaiti firms (mentioning a 10% preference). Regarding other American firms in Kuwait, the Ambassador advised the PM of taxation problems being experienced by a number of U.S. firms. The PM admitted the tax law, dating back to the 1950's, was archaic. He said the GOK had sent new legislation to the Parliament for consideration.

110. (U) Baghdad: Minimize considered.

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